

Lessons Learnt Review

**Lessons learnt from the historic events in the parish of St
Margaret's, Tylers Green**

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1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This report has been commissioned by the Diocese of Oxford regarding the case of spiritual abuse perpetrated by the Reverend Michael Hall in the parish during his time, as priest in charge and then vicar, at St Margaret's Church, Tylers Green, Buckinghamshire from 1981 to his retirement in 2000.
- 1.2 In January 2020 a young man, a former member of the congregation during the years that Reverend Hall was priest in charge/ vicar at St Margaret's Church, tragically took his own life. He was a member of the congregation while he was growing up and into adulthood. In the days before his death the young man spoke to another member of the clergy and told them that he was "suffering from depression as a result of not being able to move on from the trauma caused by Reverend Hall". On learning of the young man's death, the current vicar raised serious concerns with the diocesan safeguarding team about the past behaviour of the previous incumbent, Reverend Hall.
- 1.3 There then followed a thorough independent investigation into the conduct of Reverend Hall. The investigation concluded on the balance of probabilities that Reverend Hall had spiritually abused a significant number of the congregation, and that he had engaged in sexual inappropriate behaviour with members of the congregation, which was witnessed by children and young people.
- 1.4 Consequently, the diocese commissioned this independent learning review to examine its practices and responses during Reverend Hall's time at St Margaret's Church to identify lessons to be learned from the case which could be applied to future cases and to inform further improvements in practice and policy.
- 1.5 Spiritual abuse can be understood as a form of coercion and control, and therefore features some of characteristics of domestic abuse, grooming and radicalisation.
- 1.6 Reverend Hall is described as a bully, who used coercion and control to silence dissent, isolate the congregation, make them dependent on him and to exploit them. He emotionally abused people and used scripture and fear of hell to control them. Anyone can be made vulnerable by spiritual abuse. Some parishioners, including some of the Parochial Church Council did not recognise they were being abused at the time.
- 1.7 Some parishioners had concerns about Reverend Hall's ministry, but their attempts to reason with him persistently failed. Given the power imbalance between Reverend Hall and members of the congregation and in the relationship between the abused and the abuser, such attempts at resolving complaints may actually have exposed victims/ survivors to further harm. Consequently, there was a need for others in positions of authority to have dealt with complaints on the parishioners' behalf. However, churchwardens and the other members of the PCC did not act on or report Reverend Hall's abusive behaviour to the diocese. When his abusive behaviour did come to

the attention of the diocese, no action was taken. Some responses to complaints excused and minimised Reverend Hall's behaviour and some complaints did not receive a response at all.

- 1.8 At the time of Michael Hall's ministry, there were no workable formal systems for managing the performance and behaviour of clergy. The disciplinary procedures, which may have resulted in Reverend Hall's removal from office and ministry, were not invoked, probably because of their complexity, cost, and protracted nature.
- 1.9 Since Reverend Hall's retirement in 2000 the Church of England and the Diocese of Oxford have made significant changes to its systems and practice which considerably improve the prevention, recognition and reporting of, and response to, abuse.
- 1.10 There are more robust procedures for the discernment and training of priests and for recruitment between dioceses. Greater oversight of clergy has been enabled by the introduction of management tools. There has been considerable investment in safeguarding, and formal systems for safeguarding and handling complaints have been developed. Consequently, the diocese is in a much better position to detect and prevent abuse.
- 1.11 Further work, however, still needs to be done on recognising and responding to spiritual abuse. This includes raising awareness of spiritual abuse in church communities, in particular recognising its characteristics, which include psychological and emotional abuse, grooming, seduction, manipulation, the use of power and the creation of dependency.
- 1.12 This learning review makes 13 recommendations in the following areas:
 - Increasing awareness and understanding of spiritual abuse.
 - Improving the clarity and consistency of information for victims to come forward when they are experiencing abuse.
 - Ensuring complaints are monitored.
 - Improving oversight of, and support for, clergy.
 - Reinforcing the Clergy Code of Conduct.
 - Strengthening systems of accountability for bishops' decisions in the discernment and training processes for priests.
 - Ensuring robust responses to adversarial and litigious behaviour.
 - Ensuring that penalties for spiritual abuse are consistent.
 - The prevention and detection of spiritual abuse requires constant vigilance. Consequently, the diocese and parishes need to continue to support and nurture a culture which makes safeguarding for both children and adults a priority.

2. Introduction and purpose of the review

- 2.1 This report has been commissioned by the Diocese of Oxford regarding the case of spiritual abuse perpetrated by the Reverend Michael Hall in the parish during his time, as priest in charge and then vicar, at St Margaret's Church, Tylers Green, Buckinghamshire from 1981 to his retirement in 2000.
- 2.2 In January 2020 a young man, a former member of the congregation during the years that Reverend Hall was priest in charge/ vicar at St Margaret's Church, tragically took his own life. He was a member of the congregation while he was growing up and into adulthood. In the days before his death the young man spoke to another member of the clergy and told them that he was "suffering from depression as a result of not being able to move on from the trauma caused by Reverend Hall". On learning of the young man's death, the current Vicar of St Margaret's Church raised serious concerns with the diocesan safeguarding team about the past behaviour of the previous incumbent, Reverend Hall.
- 2.3 These concerns were within the context of the Church of England Past Cases Review 2 (PCR2). PCR2 was commissioned by the Archbishops' Council in 2019 as part of the Church's overall commitment to improving the way in which the Church responded to allegations and concerns. PCR2 aimed to ensure that any file that could contain information regarding a concern, allegation or conviction in relation to abusive behaviour by a living member of the clergy or church officer, (whether still in that position or not) was identified, read and analysed by independent safeguarding professionals. Alongside all dioceses in the Church of England, the Diocese of Oxford undertook a comprehensive file review beginning in 2020.
- 2.4 In response to the concerns raised by the current Vicar of St Margaret's Church in January 2020 a thorough independent investigation was made into the conduct of Reverend Hall. In line with PCR2 a comprehensive file review was carried out. The investigation gathered information from victims/ survivors (terminology as used by the Church of England for example in the Parish Safeguarding Handbook), and witnesses, which included allegations of spiritual abuse, coercive behaviour and inappropriate sexual activity. A public statement was read out at a St Margaret's Church service on 3rd April 2022. The purpose of the statement was to bring the concerns about Reverend Hall's ministry into the public arena, to identify and support any as yet unknown victims, and to offer support to anyone who needed it. The statement was also published in the Church Times and in a local newspaper. The invitation to come forward was shared with the parish of St. Margaret's Aspley, where Reverend Hall had served his curacy, and the parish of St John the Divine, where he had served as incumbent. The Diocese of Oxford set up a confidential helpline for anyone wishing to come forward with information, including the partners and children of those who had encountered Reverend Hall. The current Bishop of Buckingham met with those who came forward during the investigation and apologised to each of them on behalf of the Church for Reverend Hall's behaviour.

- 2.5 The investigation included reviews of documentation about the allegations against Reverend Hall, which were shared by the diocese with Thames Valley Police and the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). Both confirmed that they were taking no further action.
- 2.6 The Diocese intended to offer Reverend Hall the opportunity to respond to the allegations that were made against him. This would have happened at the conclusion of the information gathering stage of the investigation. However, Reverend Hall's death in June 2021 meant this was not possible. The Diocese has offered the family of Reverend Hall opportunity to contribute to the review but the family have declined this offer.
- 2.7 The investigation concluded on the balance of probabilities that Reverend Hall had spiritually abused a significant number of the congregation, and that he had engaged in inappropriate sexual behaviour with members of the congregation, which was witnessed by children and young people.
- 2.8 The Diocese is determined to learn in order to continue to build systems and cultures that protect church communities from harm. It commissioned this independent learning review (the Review) to examine its practices and responses during Reverend Hall's time at St Margaret's Church. The purpose of the Review is not to reinvestigate but to identify lessons to be learned from the case which could be applied to future cases and to inform further improvements in practice and policy.
- 2.9 Seven areas of focus for learning were specified in the terms of reference for this Review (see Appendix A).

3. The process of the review

- 3.1 Following the development of the terms of reference for this Review, independent reviewers were appointed. The independent reviewers met with diocese representatives in November 2022 to agree the process for undertaking the Review. The methodology included reading Reverend Hall's "blue file" (personnel records) and associated records from 1980 to 2000, notes of enquires made by the diocesan safeguarding team in 2020 and notes of interviews conducted, and statements taken, as part of the investigation in 2021-22 into Reverend Hall's conduct; internet research; and speaking with several individuals, some of whom knew Reverend Hall and some of whom offered insight into current policy and practice. The purpose of this research was to understand the processes and culture of the Church of England and, in particular, of St Margaret's Church and the Diocese of Oxford between 1981 and 2000, which did not prevent spiritual abuse from taking place and which did not stop it from happening when it was suspected or recognised. This Review also identifies what has changed since that time and what still needs to change to improve the prevention, recognition and reporting of, and the response to, abuse.
- 3.2 A chronology has been compiled of:

- Key events during Reverend Hall's ministry.
 - Concerns raised about Reverend Hall's conduct during his time at St Margaret's Church and the responses of the parish or diocese to these concerns.
 - Letters written by Reverend Hall to parishioners the content of which should have raised concerns about his ministry.
- 3.3 A summarised chronology is in section 6 of this report and the full chronology is shown at Appendix B.

4. How spiritual abuse and inappropriate behaviour was manifested and the emerging picture of the character and ministry of Reverend Hall

- 4.1 It is not the purpose of this Review to give a detailed account of the investigation into Reverend Hall's behaviour and what happened at St Margaret's Church between 1981 and 2000. It is, however, necessary to understand Reverend Hall's character as portrayed in the accounts of victims/ survivors, witnesses and others who had dealings with him and how the spiritual abuse perpetrated by Reverend Hall was manifested.

This is how Reverend Hall was described:

- 4.2 Reverend Hall was described as an orthodox Christian who was opposed to the more liberal views of the Church. This included the ordination of women vicars, the acceptance of homosexuality within the church, the acceptance of multi-faith worship and the denial of miracles performed.
- 4.3 While Reverend Hall could be charming on occasion (the Diocese of Oxford received letters confirming this), he had mood swings and a temper. He was a physically imposing man who had boxed in his earlier life and his presence could be intimidating. There are several reports of Reverend Hall being physically aggressive towards others. He threw "no parking" cones at a police officer, he punched a member of the congregation in the arm to prevent him from leaving a service, and there are reports of Reverend Hall hitting two people on separate occasions.
- 4.4 Reverend Hall did not accept criticism and responded to it in defensive, challenging, adversarial, and sometimes, litigious ways.
- 4.5 Reverend Hall would cite verses of the Bible to command obedience and suppress dissent. He expected the congregation to conform to his word, which he said was "the word of God", and consequently to accept his spiritual leadership as absolute.

- 4.6 Five of the victims interviewed described Reverend Hall as a bully. He belittled and humiliated both adults and children, sometimes from the pulpit in front of the whole congregation. Reverend Hall ostracised and publicly derided and identified individuals for their disloyalty. Children were made to feel worthless and were paralysed with fear should they be found to be “not right with Reverend Hall”. And if they were “not right with him” they were “not right with God”.
- 4.7 Specific examples cited during the investigation and interviews for this review included:
- 4.8 Reverend Hall held overly long prayer meetings (up to four hours) and there were instances where he locked people in rooms in the church/ parish rooms for hours. During the interviews for this review one of the victims described this as false imprisonment, but the incident was not reported to the police.
- 4.9 Some children were told by Reverend Hall that their parents were “stupid”.
- 4.10 One woman was encouraged by Reverend Hall to restart a relationship with a man who had domestically abused her.
- 4.11 Reverend Hall controlled members of the congregation and the Parochial Church Council (PCC). For example, it appears that at least some parishioners were told not to have any friends outside of church.
- 4.12 Reverend Hall sought to heal a couple’s seriously ill child through prayer, but when his prayers did not make the child any better, he publicly blamed the parents. The couple were in doubt about having a life-saving operation on their child because it would displease Reverend Hall.
- 4.13 As well as spiritually abusing the PCC and the congregation, there were examples of Reverend Hall acting in inappropriate, overbearing, threatening and intimidating ways towards representatives of the diocese, including senior clergy, the local parish and district councils and to the police.
- 4.14 Some of the people who knew Reverend Hall described his ministry at St Margaret’s Church as akin to a cult.
- 4.15 Reverend Hall inappropriately shared highly sensitive information about people with other members of the congregation.
- 4.16 Inappropriate sexual behaviour**
- 4.17 Young people saw Reverend Hall and other members of the congregation together completely naked and touching one another and having naked saunas together. Reverend Hall said they were giving each other healing massages. Reverend Hall called this “healing ministry”, telling parishioners that it was a divinely inspired direction for the church to take. This concept of “healing ministry” was used to spiritualise and normalise naked massage, saunas and nudity, and the construction of a sauna at St Margaret’s Parish

Rooms. Reverend Hall extended this form of ministry beyond St Margaret's Church by imposing nudity and touching on families within their own homes. Some victims described a distinct pressure to accept nakedness as a "natural" experience and that showing any sign of embarrassment or shyness could be met with "threatening consequences". Some children saw Reverend Hall naked in their own home and he made no attempt to dress.

- 4.18 Some interviewees said that when they were children Reverend Hall had pinched their bottoms.
- 4.19 Reverend Hall was also overtly sexual and used innuendos in routine dialogue. He said inappropriate things to one young woman in both her teenage years and in her twenties, including that she was highly sexed, he found her very attractive and he felt "funny" being around her. He suggested that she might feel uncomfortable hugging her father and, in another example, he said breast feeding was a "turn on" for the mother.

5. The effects of Reverend Hall's behaviour on people

- 5.1 Impact of Reverend Hall's behaviour on people was wide-ranging and the examples given in the following paragraphs illustrate the enormity of the psychological and physical harm he caused; how he undermined people and made them dependent on him; how he isolated people and trapped them in his ministry, threatening them against leaving St Margaret's Church.

5.2 The emotional and physical impact on people

- 5.3 The victims/ survivors of Reverend Hall's ministry described his effect on them variously as engendering feelings of worthlessness, self-doubt, low self-esteem, self-blame and a fear of making mistakes. This led them to struggle to recover from mistakes, to be unable to make decisions and to be unable to have opinions other than those generated by Reverend Hall. They experienced depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, mental breakdown, psychosis and suicidal ideation and, self-harmed and made suicide attempts. For some people these feelings and health conditions have continued long after Reverend Hall retired.
- 5.4 Others described breaking down in tears and feelings of shame, guilt, confusion, helplessness. Some experienced heart palpitations, headaches, stress and a mix of unregulated emotions.
- 5.5 One victim said that as a result of Reverend Hall's behaviour, they were off sick from work and were prescribed anti-depressant medication.
- 5.6 One victim described "terror" and abuse suffered at the hands of Reverend Hall, which caused them to fear making mistakes and which led to difficulties in their adulthood.

- 5.7 The current Vicar of St Margaret's Church commented that several people, who knew the family of the young man who took his own life, were deeply affected by Reverend Hall; and that some of Reverend Hall's actions left parishioners psychologically and spiritually damaged.
- 5.8 A prominent member of the community described how on one occasion Reverend Hall, during his sermon, picked up a Bible and threw it to the back of church to make a point. His son asked him why Reverend Hall was angry all the time. This community member described Reverend Hall as becoming "more and more bombastic, more and more unreasonable and macho, and at times obnoxious".
- 5.9 Reverend Hall's behaviour not only affected members of the congregation. A now ordained vicar was on placement to one of Reverend Hall's previous parishes in the 1970s and was mentored by him. She described that when she asked him a question (which she was required to do), Reverend Hall did not answer the question. Instead, he became angry, and she felt like a "little child waiting to be punished". She explained that it was usual for her "to leave the parish feeling threatened, intimidated, undermined and therefore insecure". Consequently, she sought and was granted a transfer to another placement.
- 5.10 There were several town planning issues which involved Reverend Hall and St Margaret's Church. A senior planning professional from the local council reported that staff he managed were often reduced to tears because of Reverend Hall's "incessant bullying".

5.11 The impact on relationships and isolation

- 5.12 One victim explained that the young man who took his own life in 2020 had lived with Reverend Hall for a period of time after Reverend Hall had alienated him from his parents. For this young man's family, Reverend Hall's behaviour damaged the relationship between parents and children, creating issues and divisions between the whole family, which have remained to this day. Reverend Hall belittled the parents resulting in the children gravitating towards Reverend Hall. The parents were "shattered" when they learned many years later that Reverend Hall had told their own children that they were not their "real parents". At the time the parents had little understanding of the impact of Reverend Hall on their children, and the extent of the trauma caused by Reverend Hall, but following their son's death, they have recognised the spiritual abuse they suffered.
- 5.13 Good friendships children formed at church with other children were described as having been ripped apart when their parents fell foul of Reverend Hall and left St Margaret's Church. Children were not then able to see each other again out of fear and this led to sadness and confusion. Children also found that making friends at school was difficult because Reverend Hall might not approve.

- 5.14 One victim reported how Reverend Hall did not allow her and husband to have any friends outside of church and as a result her husband did not speak to his parents for two to three years.
- 5.15 Another victim explained how she felt more and more uncomfortable about church life as Reverend Hall became increasingly critical of others. She described how Reverend Hall held services in the dark and members of the congregation ran out crying. She mentioned how friends left the church in large numbers and Reverend Hall told her and her husband that they must never contact these people again. She explained that the demands and stress Reverend Hall placed on her husband became too great for him and so they decided to leave the church, but this was very unpleasant and difficult for them. Her husband had a high profile at St Margaret's Church and Reverend Hall made them swear that they would never tell anyone why they had left. This (ex)-member of the congregation holds Reverend Hall responsible for her husband's illness and subsequent death.

5.16 Dependency

- 5.17 Even after Reverend Hall left St. Margaret's Church, one victim felt compelled, or expected, to continue to contact Reverend Hall. He described this as an "addiction of validation".
- 5.18 One victim married and moved away from the area. She reported that the first months of their married life were very difficult because they could not accept that they did not have to be "right" with Reverend Hall. It took time to extricate themselves from Reverend Hall's "clutches" as they were very afraid of him and the potential consequences for their siblings and parents who at that time remained involved with Reverend Hall.
- 5.19 Until 2019 the siblings of this family never discussed Reverend Hall as a group and what he did to them. It was not until they began to do this that they realised that Reverend Hall had spiritually abused each of them. One of the siblings now believes that they would have all left St Margaret's Church much earlier had they known the extent of each other's troubles that were caused by Reverend Hall, but they were all in so much fear and doubt that they carried on.
- 5.20 Another victim said that as her involvement with the church grew, she increasingly began to see Reverend Hall as a "father figure" to her. She explained that Reverend Hall had persuaded people to hand over the deeds of their houses to the church. He said that wealth was "bad" and wealthy people were "dirty and evil". He told this victim that if she gave her money to the church she would be cleansed and her soul healed, but if she did not, God would punish her.
- 5.21 One husband and wife described how their daughter died at a young age and that they had no intention of leaving St Margaret's because she was buried in St Margaret's churchyard. Reverend Hall treated them well, but they were saddened and uncomfortable when they witnessed him being rude and

aggressive to others. As a result of this, they left St Margaret's Church in the same year that their daughter died. Over the subsequent months the bereaved mother received visits to her home from some members of St Margaret's Church congregation who called her "evil" and made accusations against her. She was very upset and broke down in tears. The couple believe the parishioners were sent by Reverend Hall. The bereaved mother likened her membership of St Margaret's Church to belonging to a cult: "Once we left, although it took some while to feel completely free, it was as if the shackles were removed; we felt free to be ourselves and we could continue happily in our Christian faith."

5.22 Entrapment

5.23 Reverend Hall told one victim that people who left St Margaret's would not share in God's life and that he (Reverend Hall) was the only one who could give God's love. The victim also described how on one occasion Reverend Hall required her to read out a passage from the Bible in church. It was about a widow who was made to eat scraps of food from the floor that a dog had left. After the reading Reverend Hall said that she was that woman and that this was the way she had treated her daughter.

5.24 Another victim described how Reverend Hall shut him in a broom cupboard and told him it was time he "turned to Christ".

5.25 One parishioner reported that Reverend Hall set himself up to be a "true" priest, who was faithful and wise to lead the church. He described how Reverend Hall could be a warm and encouraging individual when he chose to be. With hindsight, the parishioner now recognises that these were tactics used by Reverend Hall to make his anger and rejection more powerful when he bullied people desperate to serve God faithfully.

5.26 Victim self-blame

5.27 The Reverend Hall made some parishioners feel that they were in the wrong and that they were at fault. For one victim, it is only now, some twenty years later, that they have begun to accept that Reverend Hall was at fault. They believe he used people's trust, good nature and loyalty and eventual fear of him to act and behave as he wanted with no concern for their wellbeing.

6. Summary chronology of key events in Reverend Hall's ministry and complaints made about him and responses to them between 1981 and 2000

6.1 Reverend Hall studied at Ridley Hall, Cambridge between 1957 and 1959. Between 1969 and 1973, he was Assistant Curate at St Margaret's Church, Aspley. He became priest in charge at St Johns Church, Bulwell in 1973 and then served as vicar there from 1974 until 1981.

- 6.2 In November 1980 a reference was received for Reverend Hall in connection with his application to St Margaret's Church, Tylers Green. This reference suggested that Reverend Hall liked to be in charge, was uncompromising and that "his spiritual definiteness" made it "difficult for him to work with other clergy". There is no record of this reference being followed up and Reverend Hall was appointed as priest in charge of St Margaret's Church in 1981.
- 6.3 During 1982 and 1983 there were examples of parishioners expressing disagreement with Reverend Hall's ministry, of Reverend Hall's uncompromising standpoint and intolerance of dissent. Reverend Hall and churchwardens wrote to parishioners who disagreed with Reverend Hall threatening to refuse them Holy Communion unless they made an unreserved reconciliation with Reverend Hall. This was known to the diocese. Despite refusal of Holy Communion being unlawful, there is no record that the diocese intervened.
- 6.4 In 1987 the patron of St Margaret's Church wanted to "present" Reverend Hall to become incumbent (vicar) for St Margaret's Church (which, as patron, was his power to do). However, the patron learned from some parishioners of Reverend Hall's character as a bully who wanted to dominate others, had an uncontrollable temper, berated parishioners in public and told them he alone had a hotline to God. As a result, the patron decided he could not recommend Reverend Hall to become vicar. The patron sought to pave the way for Reverend Hall's retirement on ill-health grounds by asking him to attend a medical assessment. Reverend Hall refused and began legal action against the patron. In March 1988 the Bishop of Buckingham wrote to Reverend Hall advising him that he would dissuade the patron from presenting another candidate as incumbent, and that once the patron's right to present a candidate had lapsed after six months, Reverend Hall would remain as priest in charge. It should be noted that the patron was not considering another candidate and does not know why the Bishop of Buckingham thought that he might be.
- 6.5 During this time complaints about Reverend Hall continued to be made to the diocese. In January 1988 a parishioner wrote to the Bishop of Buckingham complaining about the way Reverend Hall had conducted their sister's funeral. During the service he referred to people from the south of England as "snobs" and commented that northerners earned the money and the southerners spent it. The parishioner's sister was born and had lived in the south of England. The parishioner also complained that Reverend Hall referred to their sister as dying peacefully and not in pain like Jesus nailed to the cross. Their sister had suffered from cancer for 21 months and was in considerable pain before she died. The bishop replied with an apology and suggested Reverend Hall was simply trying to make light of the matter. In March 1988 and March 1989 there were two more complaints about Reverend Hall, but with no record of replies.
- 6.6 In March 1989 Reverend Hall's solicitors issued a writ against the patron for libel, slander and defamation. Shortly before the hearing that was due to be held in the High Court, at the suggestion of the patron, an out-of-court settlement was reached in which the patron and Reverend Hall withdrew the

allegations against each other. During the legal battle, the time had elapsed for the patron to make an appointment of an alternative candidate and subsequently, in October 1990, Reverend Hall was instituted as vicar at St Margaret's Church. It should be noted that the patron felt that the appointment of Reverend Hall as incumbent should have been subject to a pre-appointment medical assessment, and the patron is unaware why the Diocese of Oxford did not pursue a medical assessment any further.

- 6.7 During 1992 the clerk and the chair of the local parish council wrote separately to the Bishop of Buckingham complaining about Reverend Hall's behaviour. There is no record of a response.
- 6.8 During 1993 other complaints were sent to the diocesan bishops. In one, Reverend Hall had told a bereaved mother that it was illegal for her to lay flowers at her child's grave. Reverend Hall accused her of being evil and was "physically, mentally and spiritually threatening" towards her husband. There is no record of a response. In a second, a couple raised concerns that people had turned away from St Margaret's Church because of Reverend Hall, but they wrote in confidence, fearful of his retribution. In a third, an anonymous telephone call was received by the diocese claiming Reverend Hall was the leader of a cult and that he went to the homes of those who disagreed with him threatening litigation.
- 6.9 In 1994 the Bishop of Buckingham received a letter in confidence about a parishioner who had been told by Reverend Hall not to undergo treatment for cancer. The bishop replied that he could not act unless people put their names to specific complaints. In another instance, a parishioner wrote to a policeman, alleging that Reverend Hall had arranged for two men to sexually touch women as they arrived at a party. The parishioner asked the police and the bishop (it is unclear which bishop) to remove Reverend Hall from St Margaret's Church.
- 6.10 In 1995 letters were received by the diocese about Reverend Hall telling a bereaved mother that it was evil to watch a video of her deceased child and reporting that Reverend Hall had verbally attacked a policeman and knocked off his helmet.
- 6.11 In 1997 an ex-parishioner wrote to the Bishop of Buckingham asking for help to come to terms with their experiences at St Margaret's Church which caused them depression, nightmares and problems committing themselves to a new church. The bishop wrote back saying "I feel angry that there are number of people in a similar position to yourself who have been so intimidated". The bishop offered to find help. There was no indication of taking action against Reverend Hall.
- 6.12 Following the first ordination of women as priests by the Church of England in 1994, Reverend Hall began a petition in January 1995 to move St Margaret's Church under the oversight of the Bishop of Ebbsfleet. This bishop was one of the "Provincial Episcopal Visitors" (colloquially called "flying bishops") who had been appointed to look after parishes who were theologically opposed to

the ordination of women. St Margaret's Church moved under the oversight of the Bishop of Ebbsfleet in 1998. There is no information about whether there was a handover process or when St Margaret's Church returned back to the oversight of the Diocese of Oxford.

6.13 Reverend Hall retired from St Margaret's in April 2000 and died in June 2021.

Analysis

7. Understanding the nature of spiritual abuse

7.1 Spiritual abuse can be defined as, "...a form of emotional and psychological abuse. It is characterised by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in a religious context" (Oakley and Humphreys, 2019). This definition is used by the Church of England in its Safeguarding e-manual. It is important to locate spiritual abuse within the context of other forms of abuse which involve the exercise of power, coercion and control over other people. These include domestic abuse and radicalisation and all share similar characteristics. Spiritual abuse, domestic abuse and radicalisation all contain elements of seduction, grooming, indoctrination and making people feel specially chosen, followed by isolation and separation from conflicting opinions or sources of support. This involves the creation of a distinct identity, shaped by opposition to "outsiders", backed up by threats of ostracisation or abandonment and fear of being unworthy. Physical force, real or implied, and psychological and emotionally abusive techniques such as public shaming and humiliation to induce guilt and dependency are used to maintain discipline, obedience and group cohesion.

7.2 These processes are consistent with the Ann Craft Trust's definition of grooming, as "...when someone builds a relationship, trust and emotional connection with a person so they can manipulate, exploit and abuse them. It is a form of abuse that involves manipulating someone until they're isolated, dependent, and more vulnerable to exploitation" (Anncrafttrust.org). They are also consistent with the Home Office definitions of controlling and coercive behaviours:

"Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/ or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour."

"Coercive behaviour is a continuing act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim."

(Controlling or Coercive Behaviour in an Intimate or Family Relationship Statutory Guidance Framework", Home Office, 2015.)

Whilst the Home Office guidance relates to intimate or family relationships, the definitions are relevant to spiritual abuse.

- 7.3 Within this context, the use of spiritual justification through selected texts and claims of religious purity and eminence, which are factors in both spiritual abuse and some forms of radicalisation, can be understood as techniques used to exercise power, coercion and control rather than ends in themselves. The purpose of these forms of abuse include the exercise of power and control as well as obtaining financial and material gain or attaining wider social and political ends. Consequently, the process of spiritual abuse is not confined to the Church of England or to other religious contexts even though its superficial presentation and methods might be.
- 7.4 As Oakley and Huntley (2019) identify, "*Spiritual abuse can have a deeply damaging impact on those who experience it and can be experienced in a variety of different relationships*".

8. Recognition amongst congregations of spiritual abuse

- 8.1 During the time of Reverend Hall's ministry, the term spiritual abuse was not in general use. Some of the congregation and victims/ survivors of Reverend Hall's abuse did not recognise they were being abused. For some victims/ survivors, it has only been more recently that they acknowledged they suffered what is now termed spiritual abuse. People were scared of Reverend Hall. Some parishioners were ashamed to talk about what happened. They could not believe that they had been taken in by Reverend Hall. Some mistrusted their own sense of right and wrong and found themselves participating in activities that they could not explain.
- 8.2 Spiritual abuse can make the victim feel complicit, and guilty, and possibly defensive, so it can make the identification of the problem difficult. Some talked about Reverend Hall being charming one minute and scathing the next. They became trapped in a dynamic of positive experiences, followed by coercive control and back to positive experiences again. It was the positive experience that became the cage that trapped them.
- 8.3 Reverend Hall's ministry has also been likened to a cult. Dissent was not allowed and those who were disloyal were targeted. Like a cult, it was hard to leave because Reverend Hall had made people dependent on him, and the penalties for getting out were potentially high. These included loss of friends and a sense of belonging, public denunciation, threat of litigation and (according to Reverend Hall) going to hell. Reverend Hall made people believe they could be "struck down dead by God" at any given moment if they were "not right with God", which parishioners understood to mean to be "right" with Reverend Hall. People were led to believe that the world would end during Reverend Hall's lifetime, which reinforced a cultist environment.

- 8.4 Reverend Hall publicly denounced those who disagreed with him, and he discouraged the congregation from having friendships outside of the church. Thus, he isolated the congregation. Reverend Hall had people believe that he, and only he, had a “hot-line” to God, thus he made the congregation dependent on him. He was then able to exploit the PCC and others associated with St Margaret’s Church, who were at his beck and call, wrote letters of support for him, and pledged their homes to him personally (although there is no evidence these pledges were fulfilled). There was a suggestion that some members of the congregation paid for Reverend Hall’s legal costs in bringing action for libel and slander against the patron of St Margaret’s Church. It should be noted however that letters of complaint against Reverend Hall were matched by letters of support and gratitude. Throughout he had the almost unwavering support of the PCC. It is possible that some of the congregation were genuinely in favour of Reverend Hall’s style of ministry.
- 8.5 Now there appears to be a greater awareness of spiritual abuse. The Diocese of Oxford has introduced complaints, safeguarding and bullying and harassment procedures since Reverend Hall’s ministry, but the challenge remains that it takes someone to recognise spiritual abuse and to complain or whistleblow. This may not happen if everyone is being seduced by a seemingly all-knowing and powerful figure, as they were by Reverend Hall. For all the reasons already discussed people may not recognise they are being abused. If churchwardens, the PCC and many of the congregation support an abusive vicar, as they did with Reverend Hall, there is a risk that abuse will not be reported.
- 8.6 There is, therefore, a need for interventions which raise awareness of spiritual abuse, not just with clergy, PCCs, and other lay volunteers, but also with congregations, whose members may experience spiritual abuse currently or in the future. Awareness raising needs to include matters of grooming, seduction, power, dependency and manipulation.
- 8.7 All diocesan safeguarding leads have been trained in recognising spiritual abuse and all training provided by the diocese references spiritual abuse, but not in detail. Parish safeguarding officers have been offered training, but this is voluntary.

9. Procedures for the discernment and training of priests

- 9.1 One way of significantly reducing the risk of congregations being abused by clergy is to stop abusive individuals from becoming priests in the first place. This requires careful scrutiny of candidates for priesthood, including the identification and exploration of traits indicative of abusive behaviour.
- 9.2 At the time of Reverend Hall’s training in the late 1950s the procedures for the selection (now discernment) of priests for training were considerably less robust than they are now. For example, a grid system of Qualities for Discernment has been developed, similar in concept to a behaviour or

competency framework. This has recently been enhanced with safeguarding inspired qualities, which include professional, pastoral and personal relationships with appropriate boundaries; making a safe worshipping community; assessing risks; self-awareness and personal accountability.

- 9.3 The discernment process is in two stages, uses a variety of methods and so is likely to have higher validity in predicting performance in the role of priest in charge/ vicar. Areas of power, awareness of its use and abuse, history of the use of power, listening, valuing and respecting, building collaborative relationships and handling conflict are explored at a number of points during the discernment process.
- 9.4 A “traffic lights” system is used to highlight areas discerned during the process as “red” or “amber” for further conversation. Exploring a candidate’s understanding and use of power and vulnerabilities, are a part of the “traffic lights” conversations. Anything that is of concern is noted for further exploration in an Assessment for Psychological Wellbeing. In the Diocese of Oxford an Assessment for Psychological Wellbeing is now required for all candidates going forward to a Stage 2 National discernment panel and this was put in place following the learning review for Stowe and Maids Moreton. <https://www.oxford.anglican.org/stowe-maids-moreton.php>
- 9.5 This is a 90-minute conversation with an appropriately qualified, trained, experienced and supervised psychotherapist. The purpose of this assessment is to gain a deeper understanding of a candidate's emotional health, integration and wellbeing.
- 9.6 The assessment of candidates continues during their training. Training frameworks (updated in 2022) are based on the Qualities for Discernment, on which candidates are assessed.
- 9.7 The Stowe and Maids Moreton review followed the case of Ben Field, who was convicted and sentenced in October 2019 for murdering Peter Farquhar and committing significant fraud against him and a neighbour, Anne Moore-Martin. Ben Field was an active member of Stowe church and in 2016 he applied to become a priest. The review found that there were missed opportunities when concerns were raised about Ben Field during the discernment process which could have triggered greater challenge of his application for Ordination. The Director of Ordinands (DDO) made some cautious remarks about Ben Field’s personality, but it appears these were not picked up. There are similarities here with Reverend Hall in that on application to St Margaret’s Church, concerns raised in a reference written by a bishop in his existing diocese were not explored.
- 9.8 At the time systems in place did not require rigorous communication between people involved in providing psychological support or supervising applicants on placement. During sessions with Ben Field the Spiritual Director became concerned, but these were “confidential” in terms the processes that existed at the time. Ben Field refused to discuss with the Stowe Church Vicar some concerns raised by a parishioner about his sexual behaviour. This was a

potential warning sign but at the time it was considered relatively immaterial. Following the Stowe and Maids Moreton case improvements were made, including the development of a more formal referral and reporting mechanism within the Diocese of Oxford when someone preparing for their discernment process is considered to require psychological assessment or therapeutic support, improved communication between the DDO and Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser and the introduction of the “traffic lights” system, as described above. Following the review of the Stowe and Maids Moreton case the Diocese of Oxford has introduced psychological assessment for all applicants who reach stage 2 of the process.

- 9.9 Consequently there is a much greater likelihood now than there was in the late 1950s that a candidate of Reverend Hall’s character would be identified as a cause of concern through the discernment and training processes.
- 9.10 The candidate’s final report at the end of the training period will state whether they are suitable to be ordained. This is put as a recommendation to the sponsoring bishop. However, bishops may not accept recommendations from the discernment and training processes. There is no system of accountability and consequence for this. According to the Diocese of Oxford it would be very unlikely for a bishop not to accept the recommendations from these processes. However, as a further safeguard, the diocese may wish to consider making a recommendation to the national church for systems of greater accountability in case any future bishop should be minded (even with good reason) to override discernment and training recommendations.

10. The appointment process for priests

- 10.1 The reference received for Reverend Hall in connection with his appointment to St Margaret’s Church should have raised “alarm bells”. It appears this was a missed opportunity to check out Reverend Hall further as there is no record that the contents of the reference were followed up.
- 10.2 Today recruitment processes are more robust and include requirements for checking references. Reverend Hall had come to St Margaret’s Church from another diocese. Today the “sending” bishop must send the “receiving” bishop a “Safe to Receive” letter in respect of clergy moving from one diocese to another, to indicate that the priest is suitable. This letter also details any safeguarding concerns. In addition, the personnel file for clergy now moves with them, and in the Diocese of Oxford the archdeacon will read the file on receipt to identify any other concerns to be aware of and to monitor.

11. The patron of St Margaret’s Church and presentation to the benefice

- 11.1 In the Church of England priests are appointed to a parish. This may be one parish or a grouping of parishes. In previous centuries, each parish or group

of parishes had a patron who appointed and paid for a priest. Where still present, patrons still retain the legal right of presenting a priest to the bishop for appointment to a vacant benefice.

- 11.2 The priest appointed to serve in a parish may be either an incumbent or a priest in charge. Where the patron's right of presentation to a benefice is "suspended", a priest in charge is appointed. Where the benefice is not "suspended", an incumbent (either a vicar or a rector) is appointed.
- 11.3 Reverend Hall was originally appointed as priest in charge of St Margaret's Church in 1981 and the patron's right of presentation was suspended.
- 11.4 Paragraphs 6.4 and 6.6 of this report describe the events that took place surrounding the patron's attempt to stop Reverend Hall from being appointed as the incumbent of St Margaret's Church. As soon as the patron had advised Reverend Hall that he was not going to appoint him to the benefice, Reverend Hall became litigious. In effect, Reverend Hall bullied the patron into submission and the church into accepting him as incumbent.
- 11.5 The patron believed that Reverend Hall was mentally ill and had taken advice from the Bishop of Buckingham who suggested seeking Reverend Hall's exit from ministry through ill-health retirement. This course of action was recommended as a compassionate way forward by the Bishop of Buckingham. It is highly likely that ill-health retirement was seen as the best option because of the lack of workable disciplinary procedures at the time (see paragraph 16.3).
- 11.6 In retrospect the ill-health retirement route was not an ideal place to start. It did not address the concerns about Reverend Hall's conduct and behaviours which were adversely affecting the parishioners. These should have prompted an investigation, which might have led to consideration of whether ill health was a factor in Reverend Hall's behaviour. It would not, however, have set a path at the outset to an ill-health retirement which could be seen as a lucrative and unjust exit route for someone causing so much harm to parishioners. Today the diocese is clear that in a similar situation the focus would now be on behaviour and conduct.
- 11.7 The patron was largely unsupported. Firstly, the patron made the referral for a mental health assessment, when it would have more appropriate for someone in the diocese, experienced in making medical referrals using appropriate terminology, to have done this. Today this work is supported by Diocese of Oxford's HR and Safeguarding Department. Secondly, Reverend Hall's legal proceedings were brought against the patron, not the church. Whilst the patron sought to defend himself against Reverend Hall's allegations, doing so was costly for him. Today it would be helpful for the diocese to consider what support it could give to someone personally facing libel action as a result of acting in the best interests of the safety of a Church of England parish congregation.

- 11.8 At the time it may have been possible, but difficult because of the PCC's support of Reverend Hall, to have forced an open competitive process to fill the role of vicar of St Margaret's, or for the bishop to have invoked a clause of the Benefices Act 1898 to effectively refuse to accept Reverend Hall for the benefice. However, it is possible that any such action may have been contested by Reverend Hall and possibly in court.
- 11.9 Whilst there are provisions today for the appointment of incumbents and priests in charge which require that vacancies are advertised (Appointment of clergy office holders - A guide to good practice 2015) <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/Appointment%20of%20clergy%20office%20holders.pdf> there remains a culture of expectation that a priest in charge of a parish will become the incumbent there.
- 11.10 Much has changed since the patron's attempts to prevent Reverend Hall from becoming the incumbent at St Margaret's Church. Now the diocese would proceed with similar concerns and complaints about a clergy behaviour as a conduct matter and would instigate safeguarding procedures as appropriate. According to the diocese the culture has changed so that matters of abuse are dealt with directly and are persisted with irrespective of the nature and force of countermeasures and tactics employed by the perpetrator of abuse.

12. Response by the parish and the diocese to complaints and concerns about Reverend Hall between 1981 and 2000

- 12.1 Reverend Hall became priest in charge at St Margaret's in 1981 and became vicar in 1990. From 1982 complaints began to be made about him.
- 12.2 Responses by the Parochial Church Council members and churchwardens**
- 12.3 The PCC (Parochial Church Council) and the churchwardens are responsible for the overall wellbeing, practical as well as spiritual, of their church, the church members, and for the church buildings. The PCC also has a duty to promote the mission of the church within the wider community. The PCC may make representations to the bishop on matters that affect the welfare of the parish.
- 12.4 The PCC is made up of clergy and lay members. The churchwardens are members of the PCC. They and the other lay members of the PCC are unpaid volunteers and are drawn from the church congregation who are on the electoral roll. They may be approached to become a churchwarden or PCC member, or they may put themselves forward. In either event there must be a proposer and seconder. There is a ballot by members of the congregation on the electoral roll at an Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM). However, it is unusual for there to be more candidates than there are places to fill

because they are voluntary unpaid roles, and for the churchwardens in particular a considerable investment of their time is required.

- 12.5 The churchwardens are officers of the bishop, not the incumbent (Cannon E1 paragraphs 4 and 5) and so should maintain independence.
- 12.6 Reverend Hall approached and encouraged individuals of his choice to become members of the PCC and to take up the role of churchwardens. In effect, Reverend Hall appointed them. He surrounded himself with people who he could rely on to support him.
- 12.7 The churchwardens and the other PCC members may not have recognised at the time that Reverend Hall was abusive, may have believed that he was right, or may have been coerced into agreeing with him.
- 12.8 The churchwardens and the PCC did not act to represent the concerns of members of the congregation to Reverend Hall, appeal directly to Reverend Hall to change his behaviour or report Reverend Hall's actions to the diocese as a concern.
- 12.9 Today, churchwardens and the PCC would be expected to recognise the warning signs of abuse and to make sure it is reported to the diocese. During Reverend Hall's time at St Margaret's Church this does not appear to have been the case. Instead of reporting warning signs of abuse by Reverend Hall, the churchwardens supported and endorsed his behaviour. For example, Reverend Hall and the churchwardens wrote to parishioners requiring them to make an unreserved reconciliation with Reverend Hall. They quoted Hebrews 13 Verse 1, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your soul, as those who will have to give account". (English Standard Version).
- 12.10 The churchwardens and Reverend Hall threatened that Reverend Hall would refuse to give Holy Communion in the event of non-reconciliation by parishioners with him. Such demands were a warning sign that Reverend Hall may have been abusing his position, by attempting to use power and scripture to force submission to his views and authority.
- 12.11 The churchwardens also sought to close pathways for expressing criticism of Reverend Hall by writing to parishioners that, "We want to make it clear that it is improper from now onwards to use the wardens as mediators between the leadership of the church and the people." No alternative means of making representations was offered in this letter.
- 12.12 In another example, two parishioners wrote to the PCC explaining they had made serious efforts to resolve their discord with Reverend Hall concerning the authority and nature of his role as priest in charge, and the freedom of members of the congregation to express disagreement. They decided to leave St Margaret's Church. This does not appear to have concerned the PCC or to have led to an attempt at mutual reconciliation or change as there is no evidence of a response to the parishioners' letter.

12.13 There appears to be a greater likelihood that Reverend Hall's actions would be seen and handled as safeguarding matters today. Since Reverend Hall's ministry the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure of 2016 was introduced. Under this measure all churchwardens, PCCs and lay workers must have "due regard" to safeguarding guidance issued by the House of Bishops, and this includes reporting abuse. Every parish has a Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) who is the key link between the diocese and the parish concerning safeguarding matters. However, while there are more provisions in place, spiritual abuse and the use of power and coercion and control still pose the risk that the PCC, the church wardens and the PSO may not recognise abuse, and may be drawn into complicity with it.

12.14 Responses by the diocese

12.15 The Bishop of Oxford is the diocesan or most senior bishop, responsible for the oversight of the whole diocese of Oxford. The Bishop of Oxford is supported in this role by the Bishops of Dorchester, Buckingham and Reading. Until 1998, St Margaret's Church was within the purview of the Bishop of Buckingham. From 1998 St Margaret's Church, at Reverend Hall's request, temporarily moved under the oversight of the Bishop of Ebbsfleet. There were two Bishops of Buckingham during Reverend Hall's ministry up to 1998: the first from 1974 to 1994, the second from 1994 to 1998. There was a further Bishop of Buckingham between 1998 and 2003 who did not receive any complaints about Reverend Hall.

12.16 During the early years of Reverend Hall's ministry at St Margaret's Church the churchwardens wrote to the Bishop of Buckingham in support of Reverend Hall's demand that a parishioner make an unconditional reconciliation with him. This should have sparked "alarm bells" for the bishop, given its uncompromising nature but there is no record of any action having been taken.

12.17 The Bishop of Buckingham was also aware that Reverend Hall and the churchwardens had written to parishioners threatening to refuse Holy Communion, since Reverend Hall had sent a copy of the letter to the bishop. Not only is withholding Holy Communion unlawful but in a rural parish, where people may not be able to easily travel to another church, such a threat is a very powerful coercive tool. This was a further example of Reverend Hall's uncompromising position and use of coercion and control. The letter could have prompted the bishop to have a conversation with Reverend Hall and to have explored his motives and reminded him that refusal to give Holy Communion is unlawful. There is no record to show that the bishop intervened in this matter.

12.18 In the process of this review, thirteen letters of complaint, and two references to verbal complaints, about Reverend Hall were obtained.

12.19 There is no record of a reply to ten of the letters of concern/ complaint that were sent to the Bishop of Buckingham. The complaints included telling a

bereaved mother that it was illegal to put flowers on her deceased child's grave and calling her evil; telling another bereaved mother that it was evil to watch a video of her now deceased child; being physically aggressive towards a policeman; arranging for men to sexually touch women as they arrived at a party; making physical and spiritual threats and behaving in a belligerent and dictatorial manner. In addition to no record of replies, there was no record of any investigation or action being taken in response to these serious and disturbing allegations.

- 12.20 There were two concerns of which there is evidence that the bishop responded. One was in a letter, the other during a conversation with a parishioner. In both the bishop excused or minimised Reverend Hall's behaviour.
- 12.21 One of these related to a complaint about the way Reverend Hall had conducted a funeral, referring to people from the south of England as "snobs" and purporting that northerners earned the money and the southerners spent it. The parishioner's sister was born in, and had lived in, the south of England. The bishop replied to the bereaved family member with an apology, excused the matter as Reverend Hall's attempts to make light of the situation and commented that he was confident that Reverend Hall would not have wished to have caused distress. The bishop's approach seemed to be to attempt to smooth the matter over with the bereaved family member.
- 12.22 In the opinion of the reviewers it was inappropriate and insensitive for Reverend Hall to have derided people at all, let alone based on where they were born and brought up, particularly during a funeral service. The wording of the bishop's reply suggests that the matter was not raised directly with Reverend Hall. Today, the diocese would be expected to identify Reverend Hall's behaviour as contrary to the Clergy Code of Conduct (paragraph 5.1) <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/Clergy%20Guidelines%202015.pdf> and take action accordingly.
- 12.23 To the second concern raised during a conversation with a parishioner, the Bishop of Buckingham commented that controversy and conflict were part of church life and inferred that Reverend Hall's ministry and behaviour was something the concerned parishioner had to learn to live with.
- 12.24 The lack of response to, and the minimisation of complaints, suggests that they were not taken seriously and were not considered to require action.
- 12.25 There were also examples of complainants writing to the diocese in confidence. To one letter the Bishop of Buckingham replied that he could not act on anything except in a general way unless people were willing to put their names to specific complaints. To the other letter, in which the complainants were fearful of retribution from Reverend Hall, the Bishop of Oxford replied that he was fully aware of the situation, "but that for the same reason the parishioners did not want Reverend Hall to be advised of their letter, it was very difficult for the diocese to change the situation".

- 12.26 When parishioners complained to the bishops in confidence this could have led to a meeting or conversation with them, offering support and exploring their fears and what might be done to protect them. Fear of Reverend Hall should have been an indicator that something was seriously wrong.
- 12.27 There was a failure to act on individual complaints and the number and content of them did not prompt further enquiry. There appears to have been no one in the diocese who was monitoring the complaints and concerns received about Reverend Hall or the responses to them. There seems to have been no one to collate and analyse complaints and to identify patterns and themes which might have indicated the abuse of power and the use of coercion and control. Whilst an individual complaint may indicate a difficulty which should be resolved locally, a series of complaints on similar topics should indicate the need for greater scrutiny and intervention, especially to stop what would appear to be abuse.

12.28 Summary of responses

- 12.29 In summary, various members of the congregation had raised their concerns about Reverend Hall's ministry directly with him. The impression gained through the analysis of the information gathered for this review and through the interviews with members of the congregation, is that Reverend Hall did not listen to the views of others, made no room for compromise and showed no self-reflection. Instead, Reverend Hall threatened and ostracised people. As a result, the first level of intervention, that of the parties resolving a complaint between themselves persistently failed. Given the power imbalance between Reverend Hall and members of the congregation and in the relationship between the abused and the abuser, such attempts at resolving complaints may actually have exposed victims/ survivors to further harm. Consequently, there was a need for others in positions of authority to have dealt with complaints on the parishioners' behalf.
- 12.30 This second level of intervention also failed. The churchwardens and the PCC supported Reverend Hall and did not act on or report his abusive behaviour to the diocese. Finally, when abuse did come to the attention of the diocese, the third level of intervention failed, as no action was taken, and the abuse did not stop.

12.31 Factors influencing the handling of complaints

- 12.32 Several factors may have influenced the handling of complaints and concerns in the 1980s and 1990s. These include a culture which avoided dealing with concerns about clergy directly. Senior clergy were more likely to respond in a relaxed and informal way and often no action was taken. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IISCA), for example, referencing the Diocese of Chichester, Ealing Abbey and St Benedict's School and the Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Reports, noted that, "*Many cases...did not involve finely balanced decisions by those in positions of authority but were obvious examples of where action was necessary and often urgent but was not taken*" (IISCA C3. 20, p. 155).

12.33 There also appears to have been a priority placed on protecting reputations and consequently, complaints and complainants were marginalised in the hope that they would give up or go away (IISCA C3.30 p.155).

12.34 During the time of Reverend Hall's ministry, there was no HR and safeguarding team or safeguarding procedures and disciplinary measures (see paragraph 16.3) were rarely used.

12.35 Changes in the handling of complaints and safeguarding concerns

12.36 The handling of complaints and safeguarding concerns has improved since Reverend Hall's time. The Church of England's safeguarding e-manual contains a very detailed chapter on spiritual abuse and presents a spectrum from healthy spirituality to abusive spirituality. It provides guidance on how to respond to disclosures. It also includes guidance on responding well to victims and survivors of abuse. The Diocese of Oxford is supported by a HR and Safeguarding Department of 13 people. It has a "Complaints Against Clergy and Resolution Procedure". Complaints based upon grievances, disagreements, and/or minor acts or omissions can be raised under this procedure rather than as formal allegations under disciplinary proceedings (see Section 16). This procedure is an opportunity for complaints relating to clergy to be raised in writing and then to be independently and fairly assessed. It also provides an opportunity for clergy to respond to those complaints. It provides for other ways of hearing and addressing concerns in the first instance, such as raising them informally with the clergy involved, and it places an expectation on clergy to be open to those conversations.

12.37 Independent pastoral support will also be offered to complainants and to the clergy concerned. Today senior clergy, usually the bishop, will initiate a conversation with anyone making a complaint. The bishop will, in consultation with the complainant, consider possible options for the route a complaint might take, for example, mediation or formal disciplinary proceedings.

12.38 Now every conversation with clergy, where issues of safeguarding, conduct or capability are raised, is noted on the clergy's personnel file. There is an appointed person in each bishop's area who monitors complaints, including low level complaints, so that an emerging pattern of concerning behaviour will prompt an intervention.

12.39 The Church of England has developed Practice Guidance: Responding to, assessing and managing safeguarding allegations against church officers. <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/Responding%20PG%20V2.pdf>

13. Trauma

- 13.1 The understanding of the impact of trauma caused by emotional abuse and its long-term effects were probably less well understood in society in general during the time of Reverend Hall's ministry than it is today. The harm Reverend Hall was caused may not always have been obvious at the time but for some members of the congregation it resonated throughout their lives.
- 13.2 The investigation into Reverend Hall's conduct following the tragic news that a young man had taken his own life in 2020 was a necessary and appropriate response to the allegations which were emerging. People came forward and told their story. Some of those who had gone through a healing process and had moved on from the experience, however, said that re-telling their story and being reminded of events years later, turned them from being a survivor back into being a victim. This adds even greater urgency to the need for parishes and the diocese to set the conditions to enable victims to come forward at the time they are experiencing abuse.

14. The litigious nature of Reverend Hall

- 14.1 Responses to the complaints made about Reverend Hall often resulted in counter-allegations. Reverend Hall could not accept criticism and had a confrontational relationship with the diocese. During Reverend Hall's time at St Margaret's Church he wrote some 49 letters, most of which were to the diocese, all of which were adversarial. This figure was in addition to letters between Reverend Hall's lawyers and those of the patron to St Margaret's Church (see section 11). Over the same period, supporters of Reverend Hall, (sometimes individuals, sometimes the churchwardens and sometimes the whole PCC) wrote some 34 letters, including a petition to the diocese, either complaining about the way Reverend Hall was treated or defending Reverend Hall's actions. Reverend Hall's letters were accusatory, often quite lengthy, sometimes they referred back to events from months and years ago, and appear to have been deliberately constructed to confuse and to deflect criticism. The style of the letters could be construed as a form of bullying, designed to give the impression that the diocese was flawed, and that Reverend Hall was virtuous.
- 14.2 In addition, not only did Reverend Hall take legal action against the patron of St Margaret's Church but he also threatened legal action against parishioners.
- 14.3 Responding to someone so ready to use adversarial methods was, and still would be today, time consuming and costly. Particularly where abuse is concerned, and the physical and psychological safety of congregations is at stake, it is necessary for the diocese to consider its approach should it face similar situations today.

15. Oversight of parishes and clergy

- 15.1 Vicars are appointed as office holders, not as employees. They are in general, governed by ecclesiastical law rather than by UK employment law.
- 15.2 At the time of Reverend Hall's ministry vicars in the Church of England had considerable autonomy and there was little in the way of oversight or management control by the diocese. At that time vicars were granted freehold tenure, which meant that they generally could stay in the role until retirement. There was no requirement that they undertake further training following appointment, nor any form of appraisal. There were no capability procedures for dealing with under-performance. Consequently, clergy could not be removed from office for failing to meet required standards of performance. Disciplinary procedures for handling misconduct by clergy were rarely invoked. In summary, there were no workable formal systems for managing the performance and behaviour of clergy.
- 15.3 Today most vicars hold common tenure. Common tenure was introduced in the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Measure 2009 which was implemented in 2011. This also introduced a capability procedure and Ministerial Development Review (MDR) (appraisal). Clergy holding common tenure are required to participate in further training and education following ordination, called Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) and to participate in MDR, whereas those holding freehold tenure are not required to do so. The capability procedure applies to clergy holding common tenure, but not to those holding freehold tenure. From 2011 existing vicars were given the option to move to common tenure and all new vicar appointments have been granted common tenure. In effect, freehold tenure is being phased out and today there are a small proportion of vicars continuing to hold freehold tenure.
- 15.4 Consequently, today there is greater oversight of clergy. In the Diocese of Oxford this is exercised by archdeacons as the senior priests with responsibility under the bishops for the pastoral care of the clergy in the archdeaconry and for ensuring they are performing their duties correctly.
- 15.5 The MDR in the Diocese of Oxford is an annual process which involves reflection time and a discussion with either a Bishop's Reviewer, or senior clergy. It brings internal and external perspectives into play in the reflection on ministry. For a vicar, written observations of their ministry in action are obtained from those working closely with them, including from one of the churchwardens. These observations feed into discussion between the Bishop's Reviewer and the vicar. Consequently, the MDR brings opportunities for oversight and shaping of performance and behaviour.
- 15.6 All clergy in the Diocese of Oxford are expected to have regular meetings with senior clergy, although the word "regular" is not defined. In conducting this Review comments were received that some clergy did not always receive the guidance and mentoring they should expect. There was also comment that not all clergy have a role description, and that some view their role description, if they have one, as aspirational rather than as an expectation. It

may be appropriate for the diocese to consider the type and frequency of support and guidance that is necessary for the effective oversight of clergy and review how it can allocate and sustain the resources to meet this need.

- 15.7 While there is a hierarchal structure in place, the oversight of parishes by the diocese does not replicate the control that might be exercised by the headquarters of a commercial company towards regional offices or divisions. Parishes are independent charities and the nature of parishes' relationship to the wider Church of England is more autonomous. Ecclesiastical legislation passed places certain duties and requirements on clergy and parishes. There are "visitations" of parishes usually conducted by a bishop or archdeacon every three years. These are to ensure that ecclesiastical law is observed by the clergy and parish officers. Unless required by legislation however, parishes are not compelled to observe guidance and other initiatives issued by the national church and the diocese. Parishes are not required to observe Safeguarding Sunday, for example. This semi-autonomous relationship, together with the "broad church" culture, which encompasses many different forms of worship, means the concepts of command and control do not have the same legitimacy within the church as they do in many parts of the secular business world.
- 15.8 In summary, there is more structure in place today for the oversight of clergy by the diocese compared to the time of Reverend Hall's ministry, but the oversight of parishes remains consensual except where provided for by ecclesiastical legislation. For the diocese this means placing even more focus on engagement with parishes, building up good relationships and enabling parishes and the diocese to learn from each other. It also means guiding, supporting, and influencing parishes in their understanding of abuse and safeguarding work.

16. Clergy disciplinary measures

- 16.1 In the secular world a disciplinary procedure is a formal tool or process used by an employer for dealing with an employee's improper or unacceptable behaviour. It usually involves penalties or warnings with an expectation that the individual's conduct will improve. Particularly serious cases of misconduct, such as theft or assault, are often called gross misconduct. The disciplinary procedure provides a proper process in such cases for dismissing the employee for first breach of discipline where justified, bringing the employment relationship to a close.
- 16.2 The Church of England has a system of discipline that applies to clergy as office holders. An office holder is someone who has been appointed to a position in an organisation, but whose status is not an employee or worker or contractor. The current system of discipline for clergy, which is governed by ecclesiastical law, has a range of penalties which include not only dismissal from current role and parish, but also exclusion from ministry for life.

- 16.3 The nature of the allegations against Reverend Hall were such that it would have been appropriate to have commenced disciplinary action against him. At the time of his ministry there was a system for clergy discipline operating under the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1963. This was, however, complex, elaborate, expensive and slow and was consequently seldom invoked (The Clergy Disciplinary Measure 2003: A Canter Through its Provisions and Procedures, The Ecclesiastical Law Society, 2007). In presenting a new disciplinary measure to the House of Lords in 2003, the Lord Bishop of Winchester explained that the 1963 measure was “..rarely used, which has had serious consequences. A significant number of complaints have been left unresolved; discipline has tended to be exercised informally and on a voluntary basis; and a cleric's resignation has been a frequent outcome, not always appropriately.”
<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/2003/may/21/clergy-discipline-measure>
- 16.4 It is possible that any consideration of disciplinary action against Reverend Hall during his tenure was thwarted by the prospect of lengthy, difficult and costly proceedings, and that knowledge of the disciplinary system's shortcomings influenced the diocese's lack of action on the complaints it received.
- 16.5 In response to the shortcomings of the 1963 measure a new system of discipline was developed and introduced as the Clergy Disciplinary Measure (CDM) 2003. This came into force in 2006, after Reverend Hall had retired. It was designed solely to deal with “serious” misconduct.
- 16.6 The CDM has improved the process for discipline resulting in it being used more often. It was used in spiritual abuse for the first time in the case of Reverend Timothy Davis, formerly vicar of Christ Church, Abingdon (<https://www.oxford.anglican.org/revd-timothy-davis.php>). This resulted in Reverend Davis' removal from office at Christ Church and prevented him from ministering anywhere in the Church of England for two years, with preconditions for any return to ministry.
- 16.7 While the CDM is an improvement, the Church of England made proposals in 2022 for change (Under Authority Revisited Report from the Clergy Conduct Measure Implementation Group 2022
https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/GS%202277%20Report%20by%20the%20Clergy%20Conduct%20Measure%20Implementation%20Group_1.pdf.)
- 16.8 One of the main proposals is to move from a system solely concerned with “serious” misconduct to one able to respond more flexibly to different levels of misconduct and complaint. Three different routes have been proposed for handling such matters A) grievances – minor matters that do not constitute misconduct, B) misconduct and C) serious misconduct.

17. People made vulnerable through spiritual abuse

- 17.1 Spiritual abuse can make anyone vulnerable. Sensible, responsible and well-educated people can find themselves part of a cult and can be made vulnerable to spiritual abuse. Reverend Hall's behaviour was described by one of his victims/ survivors as "grooming". Once people believed that Reverend Hall had a "hotline" to God they believed in him, and were made vulnerable to be further abused through manipulation and bullying. They were made to believe that they were at fault and "not right with God". Some of Reverend Hall's victims/survivors described being at Reverend Hall's "beck and call" day and night to do his bidding.
- 17.2 Positively, the reviewers found that there is recognition in the diocese that people can be made vulnerable. This was also recognised in the Maids Moreton Review. However, there needs to be further consideration about the use of the term vulnerable on the diocesan website. This includes consideration of the term vulnerable in the context of the Care Act 2014 and other legislation. The term vulnerable adult in a formal legal context originated in the 1997 Consultation Document *Who Decides?* issued by the Lord Chancellor's Department. This definition of a vulnerable adult was replicated in "No Secrets" (2000) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/194272/No_secrets_guidance_on_developing_and_implementing_multi-agency_policies_and_procedures_to_protect_vulnerable_adults_from_abuse.pdf as a person over 18 "*who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness; and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation*".
- 17.3 In 2011 the Law Commission (Adult Social Care) recommended that the term vulnerable should no longer be used, as the label of vulnerability could be "*stigmatising, dated, negative and disempowering*". The Care Act 2014 replaced No Secrets 2000 and did not use the term vulnerable adult, using instead the terms "adult at risk" and "adult with care and support needs". The Care Act 2014 makes it clear that abuse of adults is embedded in their circumstances and those around them rather than in the characteristics of the people experiencing harm.
- 17.4 Some of the information available on the diocesan website helpfully does not use the word vulnerable, for example, the Support for Survivors leaflet which starts with "...we are committed to safeguarding all people, both children and adults..." However, the diocesan webpage for complaints and whistleblowing qualifies adults with the word "vulnerable". Similarly, the diocesan safeguarding page states "*We are committed to safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults to worship and grow in Christ safely*". There is a risk that would-be complainants or whistle-blowers may not understand what a vulnerable adult is, or recognise themselves to be one. To encourage people to come forward about abuse, it might be more inclusive to replace references to "vulnerable adults" with "adults experiencing or at risk of abuse",

except where appropriate in relation to the barred lists (see next paragraph). This would also make the terminology more consistent with that in the Care Act 2014.

- 17.5 Some current legislation uses the term vulnerable. For example, the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act (SVGA) 2006, requires that people engaged in, or applying for, a role that involves a “regulated activity” (working closely with children or vulnerable adults) must obtain an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service Certificate and Barred List Check and that their employer must request one before the person can continue or start work. Barred lists are databases that contain details of individuals that have been banned from working with children or vulnerable adults due to past behaviour or offences. The use of the term “vulnerable adult” may therefore continue to be appropriate for the Church of England’s guidance on safer recruitment and DBS checks, and for procedures when a person on a barred list attends church.
- 17.6 The suggestion to replace the term “vulnerable adult” where appropriate, should be directed to the national church.

18. Clarity and consistency of information about making complaints

- 18.1 Parishes and the diocese should set the conditions which enable victims to come forward at the time they are experiencing abuse. When someone is experiencing abuse there may be various reasons why they may feel reticent or unable to complain. One of the setting conditions is to ensure that guidance on how to complain is clear, understandable, and unambiguous, and that there are no inadvertent barriers that may deter a victim from seeking help.
- 18.2 In the reviewers’ opinion most of the information on the national church and diocesan websites about making complaints is clear. Nevertheless, there are areas of ambiguity noted which the church may wish to clarify. These relate to the diocesan Dignity and Respect in Ministry at Work policy and the national church’s information on making a complaint under the CDM.
- 18.3 Under the Diocese of Oxford’s Dignity and Respect in Ministry and at Work policy complaints may be brought about bullying and harassment. This is pertinent to this Review given that the spiritual abuse perpetrated by Reverend Hall was a form of bullying. In the secular world it is usually only employees or workers of the organisation who may bring a complaint of bullying under the organisation’s dignity at work policy. The wording of the diocese’s current policy might lead someone to believe that making complaints is limited to employees, clergy and volunteers of the church only. However, the reviewers understand from the diocese that anyone can bring a complaint and use the resources available under the policy. This includes members of the church congregation. This is good practice, and it would be helpful for the wording of the opening paragraphs of the Dignity and Respect in Ministry and at Work policy to be revised to reflect this.

18.4 The information on the national Church of England website regarding the CDM explains that a witness may bring a complaint but does not define the term “witness”. Consequently, it is unclear whether a witness may also be the victim. This may lead a victim to believe that they are not able to bring a complaint at all, or that the presentation of a witness, in addition to themselves as the victim, is a prerequisite for bringing a complaint. Consequently, there is a risk that victims may be discouraged from reporting abuse. Information on the Diocese of Oxford’s website is quite clear that both victims and witnesses may come forward with complaints or concerns, but information across different sources in the Church of England should be unambiguous and consistent.

19. Culture factors and spiritual abuse

19.1 The Church of England is the established church in England. It is formed of many individual parishes, each of which operate semi-autonomously and are grouped within regional dioceses, which report to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. Parish priests are accountable to the diocese, usually to an archdeacon, and through them, to an area bishop.

19.2 The Church of England encompasses a broad spectrum of Christian beliefs and practices and is very diverse. It was shaped by history into its current form. One consequence of this is the expectation and culture of parish autonomy. Parishes are independent charities and are free to make their own decisions, except where their affairs are controlled by legislation, for example, the Churchwardens Measure of 2001.

19.3 During interviews for this Review, the culture of church congregations was likened to that of extended families. Whilst this can be supportive and nurturing it can also lead to a prioritisation of group unity over individual needs or voices. Some accounts give the impression that during Reverend Hall’s ministry, the congregation at St Margaret’s Church was a close-knit community.

19.4 This strong identity can lead to a distrust of the diocese. This was evident at St Margaret’s Church and was reinforced by Reverend Hall. The conviction that the diocese was opposed to Reverend Hall was also held by the PCC.

19.5 The combination of the close-knit community of the parish together with mistrust of the diocese may have led parishioners to try to resolve matters of disagreement at parish level, rather than to complain to the diocese. This failed, however, because of Reverend Hall’s coercive, controlling, dogmatic, threatening and intimidating behaviours. By taking their complaints directly to Reverend Hall, parishioners may have been subjected to further abuse by him. There was also a culture of deference towards vicars, more so perhaps than there is today, which reinforced the power imbalance in favour of Reverend Hall over the congregation. Reverend Hall also tried to intimidate and threaten other members of the clergy, successfully challenged the patron

of St Margaret's Church and contested with local government officers. There does not appear to have been a situation in which anyone successfully challenged him. Those in positions of power, specifically, the Bishop of Oxford and the Bishop of Buckingham were made powerless by Reverend Hall, and the patron's power was significantly reduced by Reverend Hall's actions.

- 19.6 In such circumstances it is often easier for complainants to leave for another church rather than continue to challenge or complain. It appears that a sizeable proportion of the congregation left St Margaret's Church after Reverend Hall became priest in charge there. This is likely to have increased the proportion of parishioners who believed in him and were made vulnerable and controlled by him. It may also have given the impression of a unified and committed congregation. The authors of this Review were told that churches like this are rarely empty.
- 19.7 Some people may come to church looking for meaning in life or for a sense of belonging. Reverend Hall's evident charisma, impression of strength and clear distinction between what he considered right from wrong may have been deceptively attractive. He made parishioners want to please him and to fear his rejection. In this way, Reverend Hall groomed parishioners and made them vulnerable through spiritual abuse.
- 19.8 Christian values and beliefs, which include love, acceptance, forgiveness, mercy and prayerfulness, are immensely powerful and essential to the life of the church. Christianity has sustained generations through great adversity and has provided both consolation and joy. Amongst many things, the church can provide respite, refuge and a spiritual antidote and challenge to secular life. It should not be a place where people are abused.
- 19.9 Positive values and virtues can, however, be manipulated and distorted as tools in the coercive and controlling exercise of power over others. One of the challenges inherent in identifying spiritual abuse is that it can be misinterpreted as passionately held, compassionate beliefs. This can lead to a lack inquisitiveness and an overly optimistic hope that problems will resolve themselves since such convictions may not necessarily be considered harmful. They may in fact be mistaken for strong and firm faith. Consequently, as the Church of England Safeguarding e-manual makes clear, attention should be given to the impact of beliefs, convictions and ministry and how they are being, or might be, used to psychologically, financially, sexually or physically harm others.
- 19.10 The impact of Reverend Hall's ministry extended beyond his retirement. It appears to have contributed to a young man to taking his own life twenty years later. Despite warning signs and complaints during his ministry at St Margaret's Church, the extent of Reverend Hall's abusive behaviour only became formally recognised during the course of the 2021-22 investigation and this Review. This emphasises both the seriousness of spiritual abuse and the need to prevent, identify and intervene in cases of spiritual abuse as quickly and effectively as possible.

20. The time gap between Reverend Hall's ministry at St Margaret's Church and the investigation into his behaviour.

- 20.1 This is a case of historical spiritual abuse. There is a gap of some 20 years between Reverend Hall's retirement and the start of the investigation into his conduct, and some 39 years between the start of Reverend Hall's ministry at St Margaret's and the investigation. It is useful to explore the factors that contributed to this lapse of time, during which there was seemingly little positive action to address the behaviours of Reverend Hall.
- 20.2 The language of spiritual abuse did not evolve until after the 1990s. There was no framework therefore to talk about spiritual abuse, to define it and to be able to recognise examples of it. Many of the people interviewed as part of the investigation said that they had only come more recently to recognise the behaviour of Reverend Hall as spiritual abuse. It is notable that the letters of complaint about Reverend Hall sent to the Diocese of Oxford during the 1980s and 1990s do not use the term "spiritual abuse" nor even simply the term "abuse". This lack of language may have contributed to some victims feeling unable to make complaints and to describe the seriousness of what had happened to them.
- 20.3 Delayed disclosure played a part here too. It can take years for victims to speak of abuse, particularly in the case of a child who was abused by someone in a trusted position. Some victims never speak up, whether they have the language to do so or not.
- 20.3 Since Reverend Hall's retirement concepts of safeguarding in both the church and the secular sectors have developed and training in safeguarding has resulted in a greater understanding, and recognition, of signs of abuse and how it can be reported. In effect, safeguarding training has contributed to enabling the reporting of abuse.
- 20.4 The Bishop of Oxford from 1987 to 2006, was interviewed as part of the investigation into the behaviour of Reverend Hall. He was the head bishop in the diocese during the last three years of Reverend Hall's ministry. Whilst most of the letters of complaint about Reverend Hall were sent to the Bishop of Buckingham, the Bishop of Oxford was aware of some of the concerns about Reverend Hall. The Bishop of Oxford sites four reasons why it was impossible for a bishop to have taken action against Reverend Hall at that time. (i) There was a lack of official complaints because people were too intimidated to "go public". (ii) Reverend Hall made it clear he would instigate legal proceedings against anyone he thought slandered or libelled him. (iii) Reverend Hall always managed to have the majority of the PCC on his side. (iv) There was nothing in the church's legislation at that time that enabled a bishop to deal with a situation where the PCC was so supportive of a vicar.
- 20.5 The Church of England and the Diocese of Oxford did not have workable procedures in place to address Reverend Hall's behaviour in the 1980s and

1990s. The disciplinary procedures were impractical and complaints were not monitored. This latter point is of relevance when linked to the Bishop of Oxford's concern that some people were too intimidated to put their name to a complaint. It is important that today the diocese includes anonymous complaints, and complaints where the complainant wishes to be anonymised, in its monitoring. A series of complaints on similar topics, anonymous or otherwise, should indicate the need for greater scrutiny and intervention.

21. Summary findings

- 21.1 Spiritual abuse can be understood as a form of psychological abuse. It is also a form of coercion and control, and therefore features some of the characteristics of domestic abuse, grooming and radicalisation.
- 21.2 Five of the people interviewed as part of the investigation into Reverend Hall's conduct, described Reverend Hall as a bully and the reviewers found during the course of this Review that Reverend Hall had used coercion and control to silence dissent and isolate the congregation to make them dependent on him and to exploit them. He emotionally abused people and used scripture and fear of hell to control them. He perpetrated what is known today as spiritual abuse.
- 21.3 Anyone can be made vulnerable by spiritual abuse. Some parishioners, including some of the PCC did not recognise they were being abused at the time.
- 21.4 Evidence of abuse had been reported to the diocese, but the extent of spiritual abuse at St Margaret's Church was only fully realised following the suicide of a young man.
- 21.5 Reverend Hall was not prevented and stopped from abusing others for a number of reasons, some of them inter-related. These were:
- 21.6 Procedures for the discernment and training of priests in the late 1950s and 1960s were considerably less robust than they are today. They failed to detect and respond to any characteristics and factors that might have been associated with Reverend Hall's subsequent behaviour.
- 21.7 A reference received in connection with Reverend Hall's appointment to St Margaret's Church, which should have raised "alarm bells" was not followed up.
- 21.8 Attempts by the patron to retire Reverend Hall and to prevent him from moving from priest in charge to incumbent were frustrated by Reverend Hall's bullying, litigious tactics.
- 21.9 Complaints about and evidence of Reverend Hall's abusive behaviour did not prevent further abuse.

- 21.10 The first level of intervention, that is attempts by parishioners to resolve matters directly with Reverend Hall, persistently failed. Given the power imbalance between Reverend Hall and members of the congregation and in the relationship between the abused and the abuser, such attempts at resolving complaints may actually have exposed victims/ survivors to further harm. Consequently, there was a need for others in positions of authority to have dealt with complaints on the parishioners' behalf.
- 21.11 This second level of intervention failed. The churchwardens and the PCC supported Reverend Hall and consequently did not act on or report his abusive behaviour to the diocese.
- 21.12 When the abusive behaviour of Reverend Hall came to the attention of the diocese, the third level of intervention failed as no action was taken.
- 21.13 At the time of Reverend Hall's ministry, vicars in the Church of England had considerable autonomy and there was little in the way of oversight or management control by the diocese. There were no workable formal systems for managing the performance and behaviour of clergy. The disciplinary procedures were complex, slow and expensive. It is likely these shortcomings thwarted any consideration of invoking the disciplinary procedures which may have resulted in Reverend Hall's removal from office and ministry. The shortcomings of the disciplinary process led to an attempt to retire Reverend Hall, which failed. Those in positions of power, specifically the Bishop of Oxford and the Bishop of Buckingham, were made powerless by Reverend Hall, and the power of the patron was significantly reduced as a result of Reverend Hall's actions.
- 21.14 The gap in time between Reverend Hall's ministry and the reporting of abuse in 2020 which led to the investigation into Reverend Hall's behaviour was influenced by various factors including lack of workable procedures, Reverend Hall's litigious nature, the intimidation people felt that deterred them from putting their name to complaints, the lack of a language to define and talk about spiritual abuse and the non-existence at that time of the concept of safeguarding.
- 21.15 The Church of England and the Diocese of Oxford have made changes since Reverend Hall's ministry which significantly improve the prevention, recognition and reporting of, and response to, abuse.
- 21.16 Today, there are more robust procedures for the discernment and training of priests and for recruitment between dioceses. These may be further strengthened by improving systems of accountability for bishops' decisions. Greater oversight of clergy has been enabled by the introduction of management tools. There has been considerable investment in safeguarding, and formal systems for safeguarding and handling complaints have been introduced, including the monitoring of complaints. The Diocese of Oxford has learnt from PCR2, IISCA and lessons learnt reviews to change and develop. There is now much more evidence of an open learning culture. Consequently, the diocese is in a much better position to detect and prevent abuse.

- 21.17 Further work, however, still needs to be done on recognising and responding to spiritual abuse. These include raising awareness of spiritual abuse in church communities.
- 21.18 In addition, further consideration should be given to the type and frequency of support required by clergy and to ensuring there are resources to meet development needs. The clarity and consistency of information, and terminology used, about making complaints should be reviewed. Consideration should be given to supporting individuals personally facing legal action when attempting to safeguard congregations.

22. Recommendations

- 22.1 To raise the awareness of congregations of spiritual abuse consider offering a briefing session to congregations and encouraging parishes to use Safeguarding Sunday to talk about spiritual abuse. Consider promoting Safeguarding Sunday on the diocesan website and offer parishes resources, for example, a poster to display on church notice boards about spiritual abuse.
- 22.2 To encourage people to come forward about abuse, and to limit the risk of barriers to reporting, clarify that under the diocesan Dignity and Respect in Ministry and at Work policy anyone can bring a complaint.
- 22.3 In relation to role descriptions, mentoring, and one to one support, reflect on the type and frequency of support and guidance needed for the effective oversight of clergy and review how resources can be allocated and sustained to meet this need.
- 22.4 To facilitate early recognition of, and action on, matters of concern ensure that anonymous complaints, and complaints from people wishing to be anonymised, are included in the diocese's monitoring process
- 22.5 Particularly where the physical and psychological safety of congregations is at stake, ensure that the diocese leads and supports a culture of dealing directly with clergy whose conduct falls short of expected standards and that procedures are persisted with irrespective of the nature and force of countermeasures and tactics employed by the perpetrator of abuse.
- 22.6 Consider what support can be given to someone personally facing libel or other legal action as a result of acting in the best interests of the safety of a Church of England parish congregation.
- 22.7 Whilst systems may be in place to deal with abuse, preventing abuse requires constant vigilance. Continue to support and nurture a culture that makes safeguarding for both children and adults a priority.

Promote the following recommendations to the national Church of England.

- 22.8 To encourage people to come forward about abuse, and to limit the risk of barriers to reporting, consider replacing references to “vulnerable adults” with “adults experiencing or at risk of abuse”, where appropriate. Review the Church of England website information to clarify the position on victims bringing complaints under the Clergy Discipline Measure.
- 22.9 Consider whether there is sufficient guidance to ensure that bishops assess and monitor the risks when they come to a decision to set aside a recommendation from the discernment and training frameworks. Consider whether any penalties should be applied to a bishop who disregards a recommendation not to ordain, where the recommendation is subsequently shown by the ordinand’s behaviour to be justified.
- 22.10 To raise awareness of spiritual abuse and appropriate responses consider including examples of spiritual abuse in the main body of the Guidance on Penalties document issued by the Clergy Discipline Commission, together with a steer on penalties.
- 22.11 To reinforce the Clergy Code of Conduct and to ensure a consistency of penalties across dioceses, consider publishing the names of all clergy to whom penalties have been applied under the CDM, including some detail of the nature of the misconduct.
- 22.12 Consider introducing a requirement for all clergy to hold and pay for professional indemnity insurance as a prerequisite for practicing ministry. This may help reinforce the need to meet the required standards of conduct.
- 22.13 To raise awareness and understanding of spiritual abuse, to reduce the likelihood of complicity with it, and increase recognition and reporting of it, provide spiritual abuse training for all diocese and parish clergy and volunteers which includes psychological and emotional abuse, grooming, seduction, manipulation, the use of power and the creation of dependency.

Appendix A

Terms of Reference for the Lessons Learnt Review

There are seven areas of particular focus in this case and for learning for the future:

1. The investigation has ensured a full and proper account from survivors and local people affected. We would like to learn more about the culture which may have prevented reporting.
2. We would like to learn from the process for the identification and referral of potential harm and abuse and the nature of barriers to reporting.
3. To identify what improvements may be needed at a Diocesan and Parish level to fully protect congregations from spiritual abuse and the misuse of power and control.
4. To provide a high-level overview of the support needed at a Parish level and assist, where possible, in helping shape the future support and pastoral care of the Parish, its officers and members.
5. We would like to learn more about Parish oversight and how abuse remained concealed for so long.
6. To ensure that the standards for safeguarding are consistent with best practices and how this might be strengthened.
7. To identify any changes or developments to national policies and processes which might be recommended to the Parish, Diocese and/or wider Church of England.

Appendix B

Chronology of key events during Reverend Hall's ministry, and of complaints received about his behaviour and responses to them between 1981 and 2000

Reverend Hall studied at Ridley Hall, Cambridge between 1957 and 1959. Between 1969-73, he was Assistant Curate at St Margaret's Church, Aspley. He became priest in charge at St Johns Church, Bulwell in 1973 before being made vicar in 1974. He remained in post until his move to priest in charge at St Margaret's Church, Tylers Green in 1981 and he subsequently became the vicar in 1990.

In connection with Reverend Hall's application to St Margaret's Church, a bishop from another diocese wrote a reference dated 26 November 1980. The bishop praised Reverend Hall's achievements and hard work ethic, but also commented "At that stage he was one of my problem boys", "I appointed him as Team Vicar ... but there was no hope of any team relationship", "provided he is in charge all goes well", "his spiritual definiteness makes it difficult for him to work with other clergy" and "You would get a remarkable man but not the easiest to have around." There is no record of any follow up on this reference.

In 1982 Reverend Hall and the churchwardens wrote to two parishioners, who had been critical of Reverend Hall's ministry, requiring them to make an unreserved reconciliation with Reverend Hall. The churchwardens quoted Hebrews 13 Verse 1. "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your soul, as those who will have to give account" (English Standard Version). The churchwardens also wrote in October 1982 "We want to make it clear that it is improper from now onwards to use the wardens as mediators between the leadership of the church and the people."

In November 1982 Reverend Hall had a conversation with a parishioner who was unable to accept the nature of Reverend Hall's ministry as priest in charge and who felt obliged to go to higher authority. Reverend Hall wrote to the Bishop of Buckingham urging him to respond to the parishioner so that the parishioner might receive his (the bishop's) "priestly ministry and help". The bishop met with the parishioner saying that from biblical times there had always been conflicts and controversies in the life of the church.

In December 1982 Reverend Hall wrote to two parishioners saying "a spirit of dissension in the Church is not only harmful to yourselves but indeed to the whole body of Christ" and that there was "no room in our or any church for the kind of division and dissension which has caused so much distress to many people in the last 18 months". And "it is vital you should have made up your mind with me before you come to seek communion on Sunday". Reverend Hall copied the letter to the Bishop of Buckingham, but it appears there was no intervention from him, despite it being unlawful for a priest to refuse Holy Communion. On the same day Reverend Hall wrote a similar letter to two more parishioners. Later in December 1982 Reverend Hall and the churchwardens wrote again to the parishioners in a similarly uncompromising way.

In December 1982 Reverend Hall met with two more parishioners over matters of disagreement.

In 1983 another parishioner wrote to Reverend Hall complaining about his ministry. Reverend Hall replied berating the parishioner for encouraging families to leave St Margaret's Church.

On 24 June 1983 Reverend Hall was appointed as part time Church of England Chaplain for Wycombe General Hospital for a period of one year.

In 1983 a parishioner asked to meet with Reverend Hall, but Reverend Hall refused unless the parishioner made "an unconditional reconciliation" with him. In November 1983 the churchwardens wrote to the Bishop of Buckingham supporting Reverend Hall's position on the matter. There is no record of the bishop responding to or taking any action about Reverend Hall's uncompromising stance.

On 1 January 1984 Reverend Hall resigned his post as Chaplain. It appears he was relieved of his duties as chaplain early in his time because of (unspecified) complaints from patients.

In 1987 Reverend Hall told the playgroup for 3-year-olds who had been using the parish rooms for 25 years that they must pray before each play session. This resulted in the playgroup moving out of the parish rooms.

In 1987 the patron of St Margaret's Church contacted the Bishop of Buckingham about making Reverend Hall the incumbent of St Margaret's Church. The patron wanted to recommend Reverend Hall, but he himself did not attend St Margaret's Church at the time, and he had received letters from parishioners asking to meet with him.

In December 1987 and January 1988 the patron spoke with a number of current and ex-parishioners. According to the patron, a picture emerged of Reverend Hall as someone who was a bully, wanted to dominate others, who had an uncontrollable temper, who berated parishioners in public and told them he alone had a hotline to God. As a result, the patron came to the view that he could not recommend Reverend Hall to the freehold benefice.

In January 1988 a parishioner wrote to the Bishop of Buckingham complaining about the way Reverend Hall had conducted their sister's funeral. During the service he referred to people from the south of England as snobs and said that northerners earned the money and the southerners spent it. The parishioner's sister was born and had lived in the south of England. The parishioner also complained that Reverend Hall referred to their sister as dying peacefully and not in pain like Jesus nailed to the cross. Their sister had suffered from cancer for 21 months and was in considerable pain before she died.

The bishop replied to the bereaved family member with an apology, excused the matter as Reverend Hall's attempts to make light of the situation and commented that he was confident Reverend Hall would not have wished to cause distress.

Early in 1988 the patron to St Margaret's Church took advice and sought a medical assessment of Reverend Hall. This course of action was recommended as a compassionate way forward by the Bishop of Buckingham. Reverend Hall refused to undergo a medical assessment and asked the patron to come to the next PCC meeting which was in March 1988. At the end of the PCC meeting the patron maintained that he would not be presenting Reverend Hall for the benefice of St Margaret's Church. A few days later the patron formally wrote to Reverend Hall confirming he could not accept his candidacy for the benefice. The patron also informed the PCC. Reverend Hall became litigious over the matter and there then ensued an exchange between Reverend Hall's and the patron's lawyers which lasted two years. According to the patron this cost considerable amounts of money.

A few days after the patron's letter to Reverend Hall the Bishop of Buckingham wrote to Reverend Hall saying that he would do everything in his power to dissuade the patron from presenting another candidate. He explained that after six months the right of the patron to present lapses and passes to the bishop. In that event he did not intend to present Reverend Hall or anyone else to the benefice, and that Reverend Hall would remain as priest in charge.

Later in March 1988 a parishioner wrote (it is not clear to whom) describing Reverend Hall's behaviour as anti-Christian and how he attempted to obtain complete domination over his parishioners. Reverend Hall had told a friend of the writer to either conform to certain dictums or leave. The parishioner protested over the treatment of his friend, resulting in him and his wife being subjected to a "5-man inquisition headed by Reverend Hall which was designed to get them to submit to his will". The parishioner was concerned that he had heard Reverend Hall was going to become vicar. There is no record of a reply.

In March 1989 a witness wrote to the Bishop of Buckingham about Reverend Hall's behaviour during a Mothering Sunday church service, explaining that a direct confrontation with a senior member of the church had taken place, "who walked out with his wife, in face of a challenge by minders".

In March 1989 Reverend Hall's solicitors issued a statement of claim (writ) against the patron for libel, slander and defamation and in April 1989 the patron's lawyers served his statement of defence. Later that year, shortly before the hearing that was due to be held in the High Court, at the suggestion of the patron, an out-of-court settlement was reached in which the patron and Reverend Hall withdrew the allegations against each other. During the legal battle, the time had elapsed for the patron to make an appointment and subsequently, on 12 October 1990, Reverend Hall was instituted as vicar at St Margaret's Church.

In July 1992 the Clerk of the local parish council wrote to the Bishop of Buckingham about Reverend Hall's behaviour. He reported that Reverend Hall had thrown traffic cones at a local policeman and that he had visited Reverend Hall to try to resolve a matter and found him "very belligerent, extremely dictatorial and unreasonable".

In August 1992 the Chair of the local parish council wrote to the Bishop of Buckingham complaining about Reverend Hall's "tirades" against the Council and asked the bishop to persuade Reverend Hall to "adopt a more reasonable attitude". It

appears this was the third of three letters from the Council complaining about Reverend Hall.

In March 1993 a parishioner wrote a letter of complaint to the diocese about Reverend Hall. The parishioner's wife had tried to lay some flowers at the grave of their daughter. Reverend Hall told her it was illegal to lay flowers. She pleaded with him and he told her to throw away the metal vase that formed part of the stone. She asked him why he driven away so many decent bereaved parents from the church and Reverend Hall accused her of being evil. Subsequently, the parishioner called on Reverend Hall who "threatened him physically, mentally and spiritually". Reverend Hall accused him of assault. There is no record of a response to this complaint.

In April 1993 a couple wrote to the Bishop of Oxford concerned that many people had turned away from worship at St Margaret's Church, and that one person had been forced to worship elsewhere following disagreements with Reverend Hall. They asked for the letter to be kept in confidence because they were fearful of retribution by Reverend Hall or his followers. The Bishop of Oxford replied saying that he was fully aware of the situation, "but that for the same reason the parishioners did not want Reverend Hall to be advised of their letter, it was very difficult for the diocese to change the situation".

That same month the Bishop of Buckingham's office received a telephone call from a parishioner who would not give their name. They described Reverend Hall as the leader of a cult and explained that parishioners were afraid to speak out for fear of retribution. They claimed that families were being split by Reverend Hall and that he went to the homes of people who disagreed with him threatening litigation.

In September 1994 a couple wrote to the Bishop of Buckingham about friend who had cancer and who had been told by Reverend Hall to either put their faith in surgeons at the hospital or to turn completely to God. Reverend Hall told the friend not to follow through with the treatment. The couple wrote in confidence saying that they had been advised that Reverend Hall harangued people who criticise. The bishop replied saying that he could not act on anything except in a general way unless people were willing to put their names to specific complaints.

On 20 December 1994 a parishioner wrote to a policeman, alleging that Reverend Hall had arranged for two men to sexually touch women as they arrived at a party. The parishioner asked the police and the bishop (it is not clear which bishop) to remove Reverend Hall.

In April 1995 a parishioner wrote to the Bishop of Buckingham reporting that Reverend Hall had made a verbal attack on a police constable and that Reverend Hall had told a bereaved mother that it was evil to watch a video of her now deceased child. The same parishioner wrote again in June 1995.

On the same day in April 1995 another parishioner wrote to the Bishop of Buckingham also concerned about the verbal attack on a police constable. The parishioner described Reverend Hall as conducting "one of his mental rape and

emotional torture regimes on him". The parishioner also said that Reverend Hall had knocked off a police constable's (possibly a different police constable) helmet.

In August 1995 the press reported that Reverend Hall was threatening to sue an ex-parishioner for libel.

Reverend Hall and St Margaret's Church PCC campaigned against the ordination of women and the liberalisation of homosexuality issues. In 1996 St Margaret's Church applied for oversight by a "flying" bishop because of its opposition to women priests.

During 1990, and between 1993 and 1997 Tyler's Green paid nothing towards its parish share. This meant that other parishes had to subsidise Tyler's Green. In 1997 Tylers Green owed £133,007. A parishioner wrote complaining about this to the Bishop of Buckingham.

In March 1997 an ex-parishioner wrote to the Bishop of Buckingham asking for help to come to terms with their experiences at St Margaret's Church which caused them depression, nightmares and problems committing themselves to a new church. The bishop wrote back saying "I feel angry that there are number of people in a similar position to yourself who have been so intimidated". The bishop offered to find help. There was no indication of taking action against Reverend Hall.

In 1998 Reverend Hall and the PCC told the Archbishop of Canterbury that St Margaret's Church no longer accepted the Bishop of Oxford as its diocesan bishop because of the bishop's "liberal statements". Following the first ordination of women as priests by the Church of England in 1994, Reverend Hall began a petition in January 1995 to move St Margaret's Church under the oversight of the Bishop of Ebbsfleet. That bishop was one of the "Provincial Episcopal Visitors" (colloquially called "flying bishops") who had been appointed to look after parishes who were theologically opposed to the ordination of women. St Margaret's Church moved under the oversight of the Bishop of Ebbsfleet in 1998.

In April 2002 Reverend Hall retired from St Margaret's Church and he died in June 2021.

Appendix C

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